



REPRESENTATIVE FOR  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

# Annual Report

April 1, 2007  
to March 31, 2008





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From left to right: Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Keynote Address, 12th Annual Big Sisters Spring Lunch, Vancouver, May 2008; Representative Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, MCFD Deputy Minister Lesley du Toit (seated), MCFD Minister Tom Christensen, signing of Information Sharing Protocol in Victoria, October 2007; Songhees Singers and Drummers, led by Dell Dick, RCY Victoria Open House, November 2007.



## Message from the Representative

I am pleased to present the first-ever annual report from B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth. This report provides a summary of my first year of work on behalf of the vulnerable children and youth of B.C.

The creation of my office was a key recommendation of the *BC Children and Youth Review*, by the Hon. Ted Hughes. I assumed my role as Representative for Children and Youth on April 1, 2007.

Much has occurred in a relatively short period of time. The most obvious to the public is that for the first time in B.C. an independent Officer of the Legislature now has three regional offices to support vulnerable children and youth.

Having offices in Prince George, the Lower Mainland and Victoria helps ensure that more vulnerable children and youth in B.C. have easier access to the services and support of my office.

Working from these locations, my truly dedicated staff provides outreach, advocacy, information and support to children, youth, families and caregivers province-wide.

The work of my office is done in a non-partisan and independent manner. Providing support for vulnerable youngsters or struggling youth isn't a political question; it's a matter of decency and practicality. British Columbians should all be proud that an independent, publicly supported organization now exists to dedicate itself to helping our children and youth.

Our assistance to highly vulnerable children in B.C. is focused on opening up opportunities for them to lead healthy, productive lives. Addressing their urgent immediate needs – a necessary first response through our advocacy function – will not in itself prevent increases in the number of highly vulnerable children in the future.

For this reason, my office provides oversight of direct service delivery by government. We work to identify and address causes of vulnerability through examination of policy and lessons learned through our advocacy work. Our knowledge is also enhanced through in-depth research and sharing of information.

As well, we help strengthen the ability of families, communities and governments to care for and improve children's future well-being by encouraging capacity building and advocating for integration of programs for highly vulnerable children.

I have chosen to highlight advocacy in our first annual report because it's an essential part of helping to raise up those young ones sometimes ensnared by addictions, poverty, isolation, racism or other challenges – to help them see there is the possibility of a hopeful future.



During 2007-08, more than 14,500 vulnerable children and youth in British Columbia were living outside their parents' home and receiving a designated government service. Of those, about 60 per cent were in care. More than half of children in care were Aboriginal. Another 4,600 children and youth lived in the home of a relative under a government program. In addition, about 600 more had youth agreements, and approximately 146 were in kith-and-kin arrangements. Research shows that for many of these children, the path ahead will be an uphill struggle.

For example, our education outcomes report, a joint initiative with the Provincial Health Officer, which was released in our first year, shows that although B.C. has a very strong public education system with about 80 per cent of children graduating from high school, only 20 per cent of children in care are graduating. For Aboriginal children in care, only 16 per cent graduate.

We know that there is a substantial incidence of mental health issues among children in care and that they are often heavily involved with the justice system. In fact, children in care have a higher probability of ending up involved with the corrections system than they do of graduating from high school.

Yes, many of these children are struggling their way through a web of abuse or neglect, poverty or mental health issues. But many are just kids who never got a chance.

The statistics may be daunting, but as a society we have an obligation to view the humanity behind the numbers and to push through the challenges to hope and optimism.

I have a great passion for my role, because children are very often the innocent bystanders in dysfunctional environments. But we can create positive opportunities for them if we really pay attention – and listen – to how they're doing and then act to support them.

Children and youth look to families and communities for nourishment – physical, emotional and cultural. They look for shelter from the harshness of the world that too often defines their histories. When this nourishment disappears, huge holes are left in so many young lives, and as a society we all are weakened.

Sometimes government, the committed, courageous front-line social workers and the amazing foster parents who open their homes are the sources of shelter for our most important resource: our children and youth.

When our children and youth turn to us for security and help, we must stand up for them with our voices, our strength, our courage and our actions.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond  
Representative for Children and Youth

August 2008



# What the Representative for Children and Youth is About

## OUR VISION

An organization highly valued for championing the fundamental rights of vulnerable children and youth and for promoting improvements in the delivery of services to children, youth and their families that result in better lives for children and youth.

## OUR MANDATE

The mandate of the Representative for Children and Youth's office includes:

- **Advocacy** – Every child and youth in British Columbia has the right to be healthy, safe, educated and to be heard. The dedicated team of advocates in the Representative for Children and Youth's office are committed to providing information, advice and support to vulnerable young people from birth to 19 years who need help dealing with services or programs provided or funded by government.
- **Monitoring, Evaluation and Research** – Ensuring children and youth across the province have access to the services and programs they need to support their health, safety, education and well-being is a significant focus for the Representative for Children and Youth. The office's monitoring team evaluates government-funded programs and services, publicly reports on them and performs research with the objective of improving the lives of vulnerable children and youth.
- **Reviewing and investigating critical injuries and deaths of children** – If a child or youth receiving services reviewable under the Representative's legislation dies or is critically injured, particularly where abuse or neglect are factors, the Representative works with other public bodies to help recommend improvements to services to prevent similar injuries or deaths in the future.

## OUR GOALS

1. Vulnerable children and youth have their rights and interests protected and upheld and their voices heard.
2. The work of the office supports improved results and a stronger system of supports for vulnerable children and youth.
3. The office delivers its mandate in a child-centred, open, collaborative, accountable and responsive way.

## **Who is the Representative and what does she do for the children of B.C.?**

The Representative for Children and Youth is Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, who believes there is no job more essential than helping young people do well in life. The Representative and her staff are focused on listening to young people and helping them get the information and support they need to speak up for themselves.

The Representative and her staff support children, youth and families who need help in dealing with the child-serving system. She makes sure young people are treated fairly and have their voices heard. She also advocates for changes to improve the system.

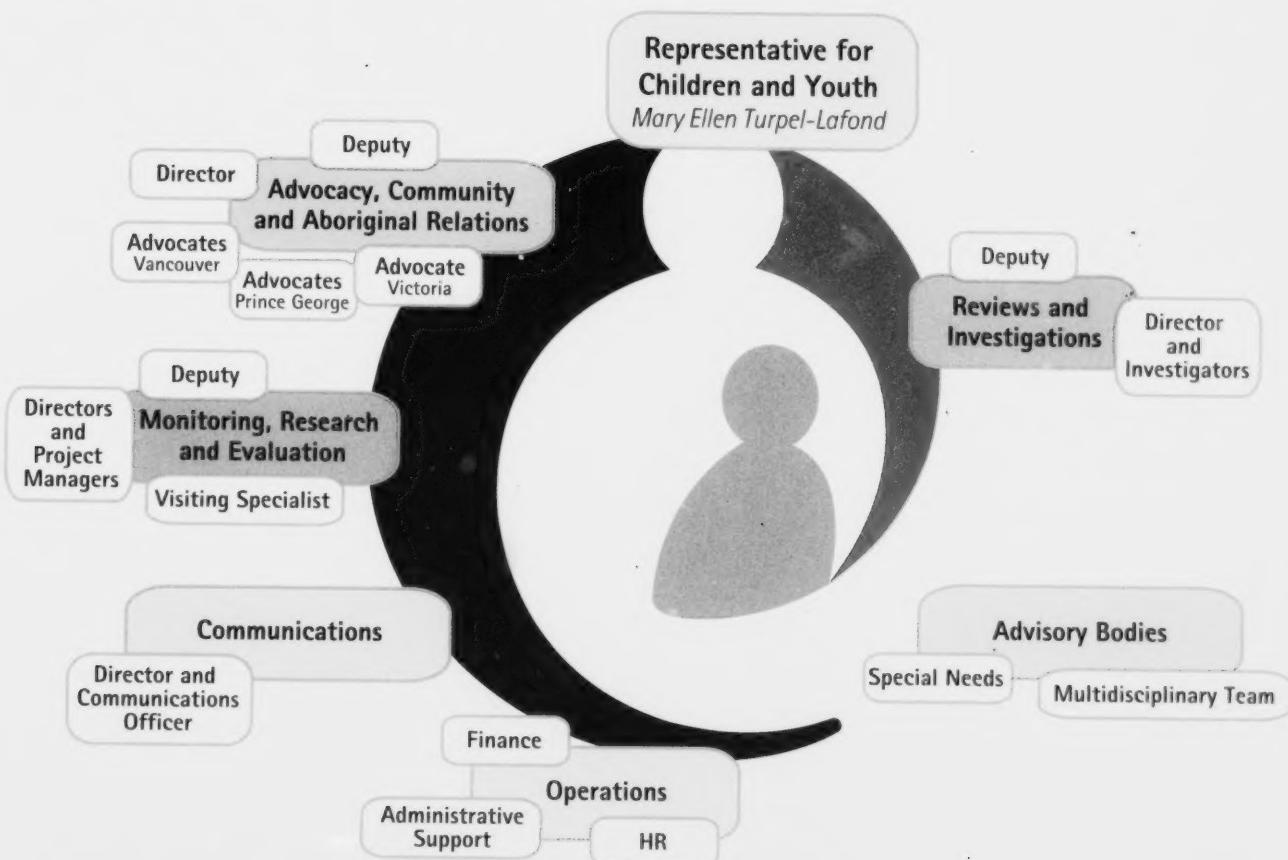
The Representative serves British Columbians from the ages of birth to 19, and she is particularly concerned that young people in government care – such as foster homes, group homes or youth custody – do well. These children and youth often face greater challenges than those in the general population, especially related to health and education.

Although she is appointed by the Legislature, the Representative doesn't work for the government in a traditional sense. Rather, she is an independent Officer of the Legislature and works for the children and youth of the province. She brings their voices and needs to the attention of government so it can improve services for children and youth.

## **Staff at the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth**



## Office of the Representative for Children and Youth Organizational Structure





From left to right: Youth attendees, RCY Victoria Open House, November 2007; Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond with Coast Salish Elder Ellen White at Malaspina College, May 2007; Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond with B.C.'s Auditor General John Doyle, RCY Victoria Open House, November 2007.



## Our Work for the Year – Focus on Advocacy

The Representative for children and youth believes that every child in British Columbia has the right to be healthy, safe, educated and to be heard.

### What is Advocacy?

Advocacy means helping people speak for themselves or acting with them or on their behalf to make sure their voice is heard. The Representative has a responsibility to advocate for children and youth in B.C., including young people living in foster homes, group homes or in youth custody.

Offering advocacy and promoting self-advocacy is what the Representative and her staff of advocates do to make sure that the rights of children and youth are protected, so they can feel safe, listened to and respected.



## The Rights of Children and Youth

The rights of children and youth are contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children and youth in B.C. have the right to:

- be healthy. They have the right to get medical and dental care, spend time being physically active, go to school and be fed, clothed and cared for.
- be safe. They have the right to be protected from being hit or embarrassed as a punishment or from being teased or bullied for any reason. They also have the right to privacy.
- be themselves. They have the right to take part in activities with friends. They also have the right to practise their religion, take part in their culture and speak their own language.
- be heard. They have the right to know what decisions are being made about their life and to help make those decisions. They also have the right to get help from an advocate, an interpreter or a lawyer to help them be part of those decisions.

## Who We Help

The Representative provides support for children and youth receiving designated services or programs provided or funded by government, including:

- services under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*
- early childhood development and child care
- services under the *Youth Justice Act*
- services under the *Community Living Authority Act*
- services under the *Adoption Act*
- mental health and addictions services
- services provided during transition to adulthood



## What the Representative's Advocacy Staff Do

The Representative's advocates:

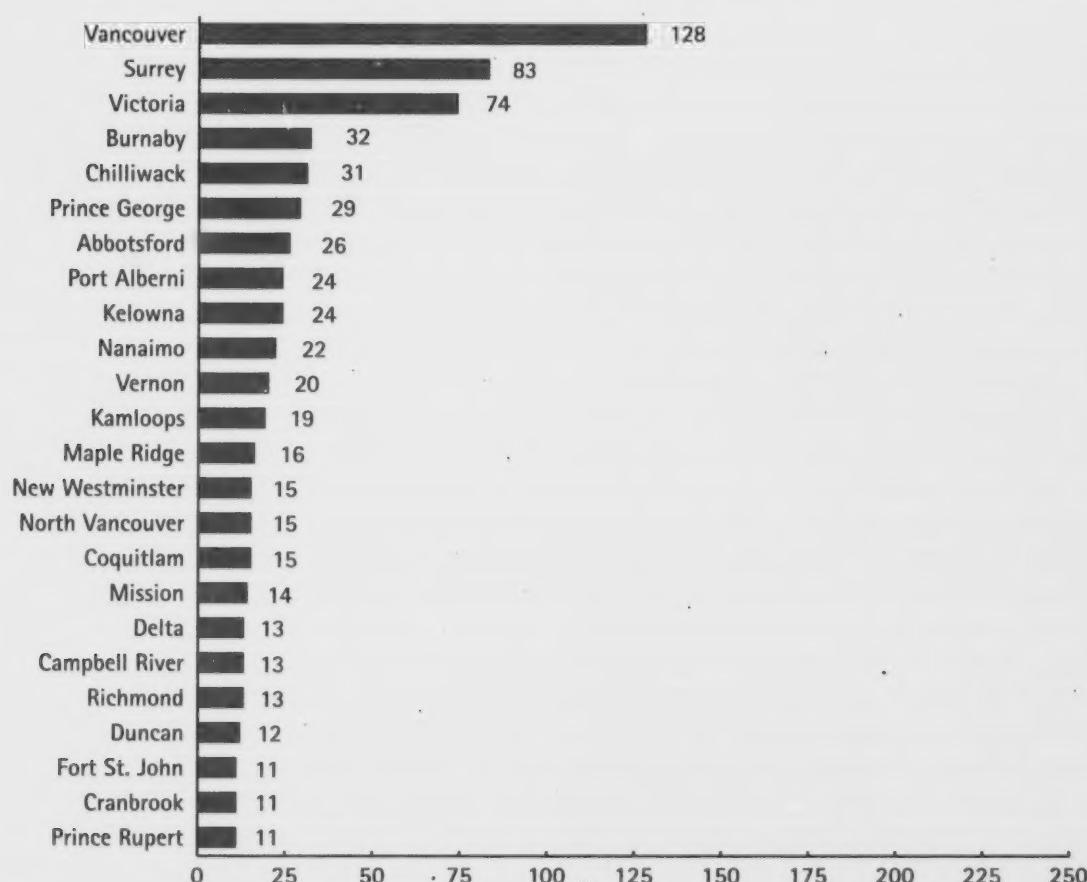
- help children and youth understand their rights and what to do if those rights have been ignored;
- help connect children and youth with the government services and programs they need;
- help children and youth be part of discussions about the care they receive and the decisions made about them;
- support children and youth in expressing their opinions; and
- act as a young person's advocate if there is no one else who can help them be heard.

Between April 1, 2007, and March 31, 2008, the Representative for Children and Youth's advocates opened 1,190 new cases. Of these cases, the majority were from the Fraser region (24 per cent), followed by Vancouver Island (16.5 per cent), Vancouver Coastal (15 per cent), the Interior (11.2 per cent) and the North (6.7 per cent). For the remaining cases, the region could not be determined.

### Advocacy Case Communities

(communities with more than 10 cases, remainder unknown)

Cases between April 1, 2007, and March 31, 2008



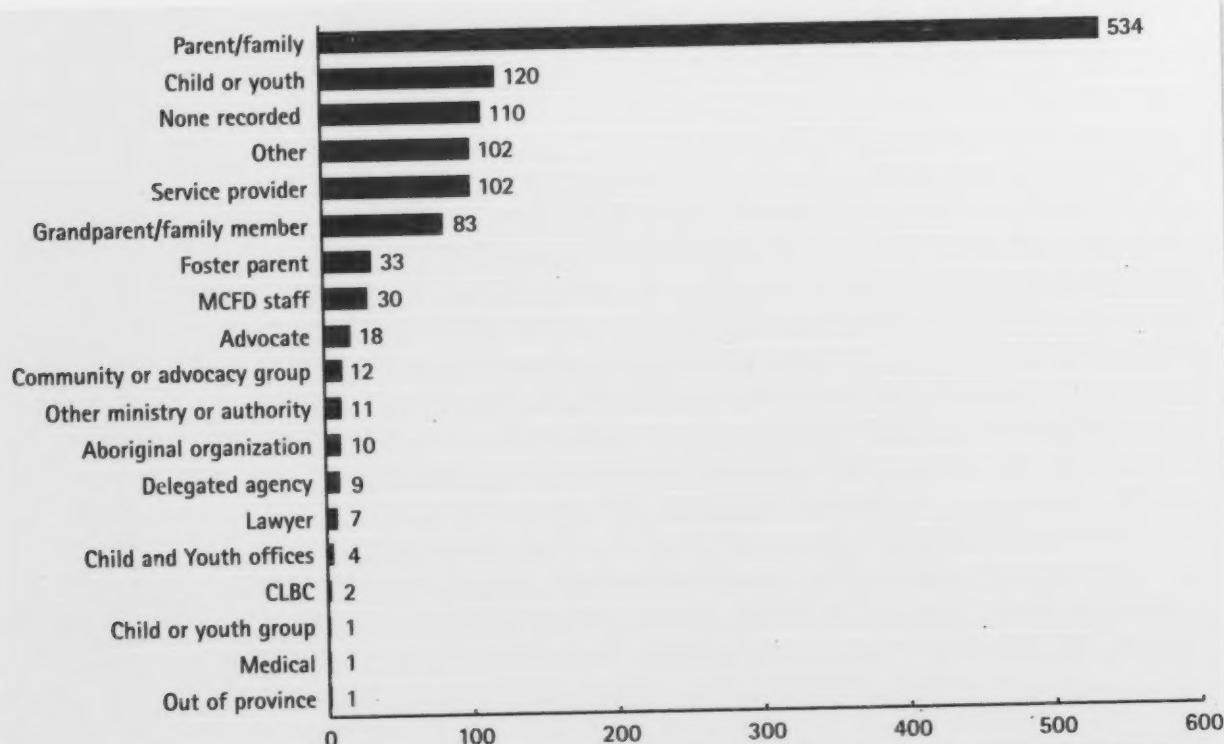
## **Ministries and Organizations most Identified by Callers**

Each advocacy case can bring forward one or more issues. Of the 1,193 cases received by RCY advocates, 1,537 issues were raised.

- 34.6 per cent related to the Ministry of Children and Family Development
- 5.5 per cent related to the Ministry of Attorney General
- 2.4 per cent related to delegated child and family service agencies
- 1.7 per cent related to the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance
- 5.9 per cent related to other organizations
- 49.9 per cent – organization could not be determined (This information was not gathered prior to October 1, 2007.)

## **Who made the Initial Contact**

*Cases between April 1, 2007, and March 31, 2008*



## **Key Issues**

In the first year of providing advocacy support services, the majority of requests for information or assistance from the Representative for Children and Youth came in the areas of child protection, guardianship, family support and dealing with issues regarding family justice and the *Family Relations Act*.

## **Advocacy Examples**

The following case summaries are a small sample of the cases opened by advocates during 2007-2008.

### **Example 1**

**Issue:** The Representative's office was contacted by a foster parent who had provided care to two sisters, now 14 and 16 years old, for the past 12 years. The 16-year-old recently left the home, but the 14-year-old was still with the foster parent. An MCFD social worker approached the 14-year-old about being placed on the adoption registry.

The youth did not want to be adopted as she considered her foster parents to be her mom and dad. The youth felt that she was being pressured into a plan she did not agree with.

**Action:** With the assistance of her foster mother, the youth wrote a letter to her social worker expressing her views, but the letter was not responded to. An RCY advocate contacted the social worker involved.

**Outcome:** The advocate was told by the social worker that it is the ministry's responsibility to inform children in care of the option of adoption but that they would not force the youth to register for adoption against her will.

### **Example 2**

**Issue:** The Representative's office was contacted by a grandmother who was caring for her nine-year-old granddaughter. The granddaughter had only one functioning kidney, and an assessment at Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children had determined that she also had a learning disability. The granddaughter was subsequently transferred from her current school to a school that could provide the special educational assistance she required. She was transported to the school by a bus company contracted by the school board.

The bus was picking up the granddaughter at 7:40 am and dropping her at school (after picking up other children) between 8:30 and 8:40. The grandmother felt that this time on the bus was too long for her granddaughter due to her kidney capacity. The pediatrician involved was also concerned about the child's extended time on the bus.



**Action:** The elementary school principal and the child's social worker talked to the bus company on behalf of the child. The company stated that they could not change their route to accommodate this child's need. An RCY advocate was contacted. The advocate started by consulting with MCFD social workers and the delegated agency, which was also advocating on behalf of the child. When it appeared that a timely resolution was not at hand, the advocate suggested contacting the Ombudsman's office.

**Outcome:** The grandmother subsequently reported to the Representative's office that the situation was satisfactorily resolved, and the bus company adjusted the schedule so that the child is now on the bus for half as long as she was previously.

### **Example 3**

**Issue:** The Representative's office was contacted by a 13-year-old child in government care who was unhappy with his foster home placement. The guardianship services for the youth were through a delegated agency in a community outside the region in which he lived. The youth's mother had passed away three years prior to this. Before her death she successfully sought to have the continuing custody orders of her other two children revoked. These children were now in the custody of their aunt and uncle. The aunt also wanted to seek guardianship of this youth. The youth wanted to be reunited with his siblings and did not understand why his siblings could live with their family while he could not. MCFD described the youth as having high needs due to behavioural issues and took the position that it was best for the youth to remain in care as the foster parents were very skilled.

**Action:** An RCY advocate was contacted. The advocate raised the youth's desire to be with his family and siblings to the social worker. The advocate also provided information and support to the youth's aunt regarding the process for seeking guardianship via section 54.1 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*. The advocate encouraged the delegated agency to support the aunt with this process by offering her additional information.

**Outcome:** The agency reviewed the situation and decided that rather than assisting the aunt in pursuing guardianship, it would make an exception to policy and approve the aunt and uncle as a restricted foster placement for the youth. The plan was for the youth to move to his aunt and uncle's home at the end of the school year June 2008.

### **Example 4**

**Issue:** The Representative's office was contacted by a hospital doctor and two social workers with concerns about a 15-year-old Aboriginal youth who was a patient in the hospital's adolescent psychiatric unit. The hospital provided post-hospitalization services, and the staff were concerned that the youth's educational needs were not being met.

The youth was in government care. She had severe Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and bipolar disorder. She was receiving services from Community Living BC. The youth was out of school for quite some time, as an appropriate educational environment could not be found.

**Action:** The hospital identified a private school for children with special needs that they believed would meet the needs of this youth. Neither the Aboriginal delegated agency providing guardianship services for this youth nor Community Living BC would agree to cover the tuition fees for the enrolment of this youth at the school.

An RCY advocate was contacted. The advocate worked on behalf of the youth with a supervisor at the delegated agency.

**Outcome:** An agency worker visited the private school for children with special needs and resolved the funding issue so that the youth could attend.

#### **Example 5**

**Issue:** The Representative's office was contacted by a community service provider seeking information and support in her advocacy efforts on behalf of an 18-year-old youth. The youth had a brain injury and a history of drug use. Community Living BC found him ineligible for services based on assessments. The youth was on probation but would be off shortly. The caller was concerned about planning and services for this youth. She was fearful that the youth could potentially fall through the cracks as he transitioned from youth to adult services.

The youth's family was not involved in the planning taking place on his behalf. He was living with his family, but his behaviours were placing family members at risk. He had assaulted his mother and sister, so he could no longer live at home. The youth was then placed on an MCFD youth agreement; however, the agreement was terminated within a month after drugs were found in his home.

At the time of contact between the service provider and the advocate, the youth was in a program for young people involved with the criminal justice system. He had been in the program for 4 1/2 months and was scheduled to complete the program in two weeks.

**Action:** The RCY advocate spoke at length with the service provider about how to advocate for the needs of this youth in terms of comprehensive planning and a secure placement option. They discussed who should be in attendance at the upcoming integrated case management meeting. The advocate suggested that the service provider speak to the probation officer and to the social worker to ensure that the right people were at the table. The advocate also stressed the need to involve the youth in the meeting and to encourage his parents to attend also. The advocate did not personally attend the case management meeting; the advocate's role in this case was to mentor the service provider in the local community to effectively advocate on behalf of the youth.

**Outcome:** After the meeting the service provider reported positive outcomes for the youth and a placement that he was pleased with.



### **Example 6**

**Issue:** The Representative's office was contacted by a grandmother having difficulty accessing respite care for her eight-year-old granddaughter who had many special needs, including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, learning disabilities and attachment disorder. She was also of borderline intelligence but was assessed as not being eligible for Community Living BC services. The granddaughter was placed with the grandmother under the Child in Home of a Relative (CIHR) program.

**Action:** The RCY advocate referred the caller to MCFD's regional dispute resolution consultant.

The Representative's office was contacted by the grandmother again several months later. She provided additional background information:

- MCFD was involved with the family due to protection concerns regarding the child's mother, who was bipolar, tried to commit suicide and had other mental health issues.
- MCFD planned to remove the child if her grandmother hadn't stepped in to negotiate a voluntary placement.
- The grandmother was now receiving respite care supports, which was the basis of her original call to the RCY. However, she has chronic progressive multiple sclerosis and required additional support to continue caring for her granddaughter.

The CIHR program did not meet the child's special needs or the grandmother's ongoing needs for respite and support. The advocate recommended that the grandmother request a special needs agreement with MCFD in order to get the supports needed for herself and her granddaughter.

**Outcome:** After further discussions with MCFD and filing a formal complaint with Community Living BC, the grandmother reported that she now has a much more positive working relationship with the MCFD social worker. She also reported that her granddaughter had been reassessed and was now deemed eligible for Community Living BC services.





## The Representative's Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Role

The Representative's office monitors and evaluates designated child and youth services and makes recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of these services. In the first year several reports were issued by the Representative, and work on several more is underway.

### **Update on progress implementing the Hughes Review**

The RCY monitors government's implementation of the recommendations of the Hon. Ted Hughes' *BC Children and Youth Review* (the Hughes Review) and works to encourage swift implementation across government. The Representative's first progress report was released in November 2007.

The report urged MCFD to work with greater urgency to implement the Hughes recommendations in their entirety.

### **Recommendations to improve support for children and youth with special needs**

The Representative released a monitoring brief in February 2008 regarding the action required to improve supports for children and youth with special needs. The brief identified key concerns regarding services provided by MCFD and CLBC, who have shared responsibility for delivery of some services to children and youth with special needs. Recommendations included improving accessibility to the system, expanding the limit for services to age 24 and reporting on outcomes.

### **Sexual Abuse Intervention Program report**

The Sexual Abuse Intervention Program (SAIP) is a provincial program funded by MCFD. A variety of therapeutic services are provided to child victims of sexual abuse, their families and juvenile offenders who have experienced sexual abuse. Services are delivered by over 50 agencies throughout B.C.

The Representative is assessing the effectiveness and responsiveness of SAIP in meeting the needs of children who have experienced sexual trauma. Key elements to be reviewed include program goals and objectives, services and supports provided to meet children's needs and the monitoring of outcomes of children who have received SAIP services.

The RCY's report will assess if progress has been made to improve the program and will include a review of recent changes made, such as the development of new standards and guidelines. The report will include an analysis of the key issues and make recommendations on how the program can better meet the needs of children who have been sexually abused.

The report is in development and will be publicly released in 2008.

## **Report on medical assessments of youth in B.C.'s criminal justice system**

Part of the mandate of the Representative for Children and Youth is to provide advocacy services to children and youth in custody and who are in MCFD's Youth Forensic Psychiatric Services program. During the course of providing these advocacy services, the Representative expressed concerns about the vulnerabilities of youth in these circumstances and determined that an independent assessment was needed.

An expert medical panel is assisting the Representative's office in this area. The report will include an analysis of the key issues, including appropriateness, legal authority and consent required to conduct these physical examinations, and recommendations to improve how these examinations are conducted.

The report is in development and will be publicly released in 2008.

## **A joint report on youth justice outcomes for vulnerable children**

This report is being prepared by the Representative for Children and Youth and the Provincial Health Officer. The report will examine the risk factors associated with criminal activity, the youth justice outcomes for vulnerable youth in B.C. and opportunities to reduce the risk of children and youth becoming involved in the youth justice system.

The report is in development and will be publicly released in 2008.

## **A joint report on the complaints processes related to services for children and youth**

This report is a joint effort between the offices of the Representative for Children and Youth and the Ombudsman of B.C., both of whom have responsibilities pertaining to MCFD's complaints resolution processes.

The Representative for Children and Youth, through its advocacy function, can support individuals in accessing complaints processes. The Ombudsman has jurisdiction over MCFD and can investigate complaints of unfairness and make recommendations for the resolution of complaints.



The Hughes Review identified complaints resolution as a critical component of quality assurance. The review also recognized that the timely and effective resolution of complaints can have a great impact on the day-to-day life of a child receiving services. Specifically, the Hughes Review recommended:

*That the Ministry finalize, with a new sense of urgency, its complaint resolution process, ensuring that the process is timely, accessible, and simple; that it takes a problem-solving, rather than confrontational approach; that it is respectful and responsive to the complainant; and that it involves the parties in resolving the issue; and*

*That the Ministry develop processes for resolving complaints by Aboriginal children, youth and families that incorporate and respect traditional cultural values and approaches to conflict resolution.*

The purpose of the joint report is to assess whether the various complaint resolution processes operating under the purview of MCFD and its delegated agencies are effective, fair, culturally appropriate and child-centred.

## **Research and Analysis**

The Representative's office conducts evidence-based research and evaluation that informs recommendations to improve services to children and youth. Data gathered during the Representative's advocacy work is monitored and used in the development of these recommendations. In this regard the Representative's office collaborates with other public bodies and agencies as well as post-secondary institutions.

During the RCY's first year, an in-depth study of the educational outcomes of children and youth in the care of the government was done. The study *Health and Well-Being of Children in Care in British Columbia: Educational Experience and Outcomes* was released in May 2007 by the Representative for Children and Youth in partnership with the Provincial Health Officer.

The report examined the educational outcomes of more than 32,000 school-aged B.C. children in the care of MCFD between April 1997 and November 2005, and made recommendations for improving the system for these vulnerable students. The study found that the educational outcomes of children in care need serious improvement and made a number of recommendations for action to be taken by the ministries of Children and Family Development, Education, and Advanced Education, along with B.C. schools, post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal communities.



From left to right: Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond with Olympian Silken Laumann, RCY Victoria Open House, November 2007; (left to right) A-in-chut, Shawn Atleo, B.C. Regional Chief to the Assembly of First Nations, Nathan Ma'thew, Jurisdiction Negotiator for the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Tyrone McNeil, President of FNESC Board, at the Annual Provincial Conference on Aboriginal Education, November 2007; MCFD Minister Tom Christensen, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond at RCY Victoria Open House, November 2007.



## Reviewing and Investigating Critical Injuries and Deaths of Children

The Representative's office receives reports of critical injuries or deaths of children who were in care or receiving reviewable services at the time of the incident or in the year previous. Reviewable services are services or programs under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* and the *Youth Justice Act*, mental health services for children, addiction services for children, services to children with special needs delivered by MCFD and Community Living BC and additional "designated services" that may be designated under a Regulation.

An initial screening is conducted on each report to determine if it meets the mandate under the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* for an RCY review.

Critical injuries and deaths that do meet the mandate proceed to an RCY Review, which examines the circumstances and the services delivered to the child. This may include examining medical records, MCFD case files, and relevant policies and standards. As well, consultation with the Coroners Service and discussions with service providers, caregivers and parents may occur.

The purpose of an RCY review is to determine if there are service delivery issues or other circumstances that would require an RCY investigation. Reviews are also aggregated to identify and analyze recurring circumstances or trends, to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of reviewable services.

The Representative initiates an investigation when the services a child or youth received may have played a role in events leading to the death or injury and when:

- the circumstances of the death are unusual or suspicious; or
- the injury or death is self-inflicted or caused by another person; or
- there is a question about whether abuse or neglect may have occurred.

In addition, the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth may also make a referral to the Representative to review and report on deaths, injuries or other matters that affect children and youth in B.C.

By law, an RCY investigation must not inhibit the work of other agencies. The investigation does not proceed until criminal investigations and criminal court proceedings are completed. If there are no criminal proceedings, the investigation proceeds when other processes, such as ministry reviews or coroner's investigations or inquests are completed, or one year after the incident, whichever is earlier.

RCY investigation reports are presented to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth and publicly released.

During the period of June 1, 2007, to March 31, 2008, 139 critical injuries were reported to the Representative's office and 76 were selected for review. During the same time period, 72 deaths were reported and 30 were selected for review.

In addition, the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth referred 12 additional deaths and one critical injury to the RCY. These deaths and injury occurred prior to June 1, 2007, when the legislation was passed enabling the Representative's work in this area.

## **Summary of CRITICAL INJURIES**

The reporting period begins June 1, 2007, because Part 4 of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* was proclaimed on that date, giving the RCY legislative power to conduct reviews and investigations.

**June 1, 2007 – March 31, 2008**

Total Critical Injuries Reported	Selected for Review	Aboriginal Children	Children in Care
139	76	42	54

**June 1, 2007 – March 31, 2008**

Age Range	Children in Care	Aboriginal Children
Under 1 year	0	1
1-5 years	2	5
6-12 years	5	3
13-18 years	47	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>42</b>

## **Summary of DEATHS**

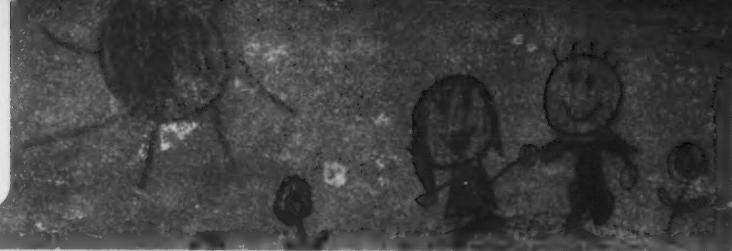
**June 1, 2007 – March 31, 2008**

Total Deaths Reported	Selected for Review	Aboriginal Children	Children in care
72	30	17	6

**June 1, 2007 – March 31, 2008**

Age Range	Children in Care	Aboriginal Children
Under 1 year	1	7
1-5 years	0	1
6-12 years	0	0
13-18 years	5	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17</b>

- \* Note – The information on the total number of critical injuries and deaths is based on reports received by the RCY at the time data were gathered to prepare this report. These numbers may change if additional reports of critical injuries or deaths which occurred in this period are subsequently received by the RCY.



## Keeping B.C.'s Children and Youth at the Centre of What We Do

The Representative for Children and Youth believes in the importance of listening to children and youth and advocating for improvements to the systems that are in place to serve and support them.

As a new office independent from government, a key first-year priority in this area was to raise public awareness about the role and functions of the RCY.

In the year ahead the Representative will work on developing more ways to make sure the views and opinions of children and young people are sought on the issues that affect them.

As recommended in the Hughes Review and set out in the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*, the Representative is to actively engage and inform Aboriginal children and youth and their families of services available through the Representative's office and to report out on these activities.

During the first year of operation, the Representative's staff facilitated 22 community engagement activities with First Nations across B.C. The majority of the engagements focused on the mandate and role of the RCY and information on the Representative's advocacy, monitoring and investigation activities.

The Representative's staff worked with the First Nations Leadership Council and the Métis Nation of British Columbia to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU helped facilitate respectful and meaningful engagement with the Aboriginal leadership in regards to Aboriginal child and family services.

Staff also participated in Aboriginal youth engagement activities throughout the year. One event in particular involved over 600 youth at a northern youth conference, where children and youth learned about the Representative's work and how her team of advocates could help. Staff also participated in community consultations with the child and youth-serving groups which support Aboriginal children and youth receiving designated services across British Columbia.



## Communities Visited by RCY Staff 2007-2008



## **Raising community and public awareness about the Representative's advocacy role**

Informing the public in communities across the province about the role and services of the Representative for Children and Youth's office was and continues to be a priority for the Representative and her staff.

As part of the outreach work, 44 communities were visited by the Representative and her staff during the first year the RCY was operational. In the coming year, advocates from the Representative's office will expand their outreach work into 22 more communities, focusing on the north part of Vancouver Island, the East Kootenays, the Chilcotin and the far north part of the province. The outreach visits will provide information, strengthen relationships with service providers and deliver more accountable advocacy services.

During the first year the office was operational, much work was done to increase the public's awareness about the RCY. Materials such as pamphlets, wallet cards and backgrounders were developed, as well as child-friendly items such as wristbands. The print materials all contained easy-to-understand information on what the office does for children and how to contact the Representative.

In addition to developing information materials, the office also hired two university students to tour the province and provide informational materials at malls, festivals and community-based venues. The tour was received very positively in all 12 communities that were visited.

The Representative's office also developed two websites during its first year, one for an adult audience and one geared towards providing information on the office's role to children and youth.



## **Listening, Sharing and Learning**

The Representative for Children and Youth believes strongly in the benefits of collaboration in child-serving systems. She attends many meetings and speaking events with service providers, stakeholders, policy makers and children and youth. Some of the Representative's meetings and speaking engagements since opening her office April 1, 2007, include:

### **M E E T I N G S**

#### *Child and Youth-serving Organizations*

Aboriginal Mothers Centre  
Artemis Place  
Association of Family Serving Agencies  
BC Alliance on Mental Health and Addiction Services  
BC Children's Hospital  
BC Centre for Ability  
BC Child and Youth Mental Health Network Committee  
BC Council for Families  
Big Brothers and Big Sisters - Victoria  
Canadian Council of Provincial Child and Youth Advocates  
Canadian Red Cross  
Community Living British Columbia  
Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks  
Federation of Child & Family Services of BC

First Call Coalition  
Human Early Learning Partnership  
Infant Mental Health and Family Law Initiative  
International Institute on Child Rights and Development  
Justice for Girls  
Mary Manning Centre  
Pacific Centre Family Services Association  
Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children  
Vancouver Island Health Authority  
Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee  
Youth Advocacy Coalition  
YWCA  
2010 Legacies Now/LEAP BC - Aboriginal Learners Engagement Project

#### *Advisors to the Representative*

Advisory Committee on Children and Youth with Special Needs      Multidisciplinary Team

#### *Aboriginal Leadership/Organizations*

Aboriginal Delegated Agencies Directors' Forum  
BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres  
Caring for First Nations Children Society  
Carrier Sekani Family Services  
First Nations and Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agencies  
First Nations Education Steering Committee  
First Nations Summit  
Joint Aboriginal Management Committee  
Lheidli T'enneh First Nation

Métis Nation of BC  
Prince George Native Friendship Centre  
Sto:lo Tribal Council  
Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services  
The Native Youth Centre  
Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs  
Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre  
Vancouver Coastal Aboriginal Planning Committee  
Vancouver Island Aboriginal Transition Team

### *Government Bodies*

BC Children's Forum	Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth
Children's Commissioner, New Zealand	
Ministry of Children and Family Development (including the Prince George Youth Custody Centre and various programs, offices and locations across the province)	The City of Prince George

### *Other Public Sector Organizations*

BC Association of Social Workers	Canadian Institute for the Administration of Justice
BC Business Council	
BC Centre for Excellence for Women's Health	Joint Vancouver and Surrey FASD Roundtable
BC Government and Service Employees Union	
BC Teachers' Federation	National Centre for Child Death Review (USA)

### *Academia*

Simon Fraser University, Children's Health Policy Centre	University of Victoria, Office of Indigenous Affairs
University of Victoria, Centre for Youth and Society	University of Victoria, School of Child and Youth Care

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

### *Child and Youth-serving Organizations*

Child Welfare League of Canada	Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children (AGM)
Community Living British Columbia	Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children Learning Symposium
Community Living Society	The Minerva Foundation
First Call Coalition	Vancouver Inner City Education Society - Inner City Schools Conference
Greater Victoria Child and Family Counselling Association (AGM)	YMCA-YWCA Young Women's Leadership Development Conference
McCreary Centre Society (AGM)	YWCA Annual Membership Meeting
National Symposium on Child and Youth Mental Health	

### *Aboriginal Leadership/Organizations*

BC Aboriginal Education Partners Meeting	First Nations Education Steering Committee
BC Aboriginal Justice Forum	Métis Nation of BC (AGM) .
BC First Nations Chiefs Forum	Provincial Conference on Aboriginal Education
Caring for First Nations Children Society (Partnership Meeting)	Vancouver Island Aboriginal Transition Team

### *Other Public Sector Organizations*

BC Association of Social Workers  
BC Government and Service Employees Union  
BC Institute for Safe Schools and Communities  
BC School Counsellors Conference  
BC School Superintendents Association  
(Fall Conference)  
International Bar Association's fall conference:  
"Indigenous Laws: Practice, Conflict &  
Harmonization"  
Law Society of BC, Access to Justice Committee

Legal Services Society, Provincial Training  
Conference for Legal Advocates  
National Roundtable on the Development of a  
Canadian Model for Calculating the Economic  
Impact of FASD: Youth Justice Component  
Oak Bay Restorative Justice (AGM)  
Public Sector Lawyers Section of the Canadian  
Bar Association, BC Branch  
Reforming the Family Relations Act: A Dialogue  
for Change  
Youth Justice Forum

### *Academia*

Douglas College – Professional Development Day  
University of BC - BC Healthy Child Development  
Alliance Forum  
University of Northern BC – Guest Lecturer

University of Victoria – President's Distinguished  
Lecture Series  
The University Women's Club of Vancouver –  
Hycroft Lecture

## **Advisory Groups**

During the first year of operation, two advisory groups were developed to assist the Representative for Children and Youth in key areas.

### **The Advisory Committee on Services to Children and Youth with Special Needs**

The Representative for Children and Youth's Advisory Committee on Services to Children and Youth with Special Needs was also formed in 2007–2008. This group provides advice, guidance and feedback to the Representative and assists her in fulfilling her statutory mandate under the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*.

The committee is chaired by the Representative for Children and Youth and held its first meeting in early 2008. Committee members include:

Dr Jennifer Charlesworth, Federation of Child and Family Services

Angie Kwok, BC Centre for Ability

Kim Lyster, Penticton and District Community Resources

Laney Bryenton, BC Association for Community Living

Dr. Nancy Poole, Children and Women's Hospital

John Gotowiec, Pacific Community Resources Society

Dr. Michael Prince, Lansdowne Professor of Social Policy, University of Victoria

Tom Grant, Superintendent of Schools, Coquitlam

John de Haas, Vancouver Police Department

Nella Nelson, Victoria School District

Dr. Christine Loock, Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children

Dr. Bill McKee, Director of the Psychoeducational Research and Training Centre and Assistant Professor of School Psychology and Special Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia

Laurie Meston, Maple Ridge School District

Dr. Jonathan Down, Queen Alexandra Centre for Children's Health

Valerie Doolan, Gingolx Village Government

Paul Pallan, consultant

### **The Representative for Children and Youth's Multidisciplinary Team**

The Representative for Children and Youth's Multidisciplinary Team assists the Representative's office in investigating critical injuries and deaths of children who have received reviewable services from MCFD within the 12 months before the injury or death.

The team's overall goal is to prevent injuries and deaths through the study of how and why children are injured or die and the impact of service delivery on the events leading up to the critical incident.

The purpose of the team is to support the Representative's investigations and review program by providing guidance, expertise and consultation in analyzing data resulting from RCY investigations and reviews. The team also formulates recommendations for improvements to child-serving systems for the Representative's office to consider.

During its first year, the team met twice and is scheduled to meet regularly in the coming year. The team brings together expertise from the following areas and organizations:

- child protection, Ministry of Children and Family Development
- RCMP and municipal police forces
- Coroners Service
- B.C. Injury Research Prevention Unit
- Aboriginal community
- pediatric medicine and child maltreatment/ child protection specialization
- nursing
- education
- pathology
- special needs and development disabilities
- public health

(Specialists from other areas, such as the Public Guardian and Trustee, the Superintendent of Motor Vehicles and experts from the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, child mental health and youth justice, are invited to participate in the team as required.)

## The Children's Forum

The Children's Forum was created as a result of a recommendation from the Hughes Review, which stated:

*That the Ministry (MCFD) establish a forum or council, including the new Representative for Children and Youth, the Coroners Service, the Ombudsman and the Public Guardian and Trustee, that will meet regularly to review developments and issues of common concern.*

The Children's Forum held four meetings during 2007–2008. During this time, the forum established its purpose and mandate and received updates from each member agency on major reports and projects underway. One of the ongoing mutual issues discussed by the group was the concern regarding the number of infant deaths where unsafe sleeping practices may have been a factor. The Coroners Service released a public safety bulletin in March 2008 warning the public about the impact of unsafe sleeping practices with infants. In addition, MCFD sent a bulletin regarding the issue to the Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents, the B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations and Aboriginal agencies.



## 2007-2008 Operating Budget

As 2007-2008 was the start-up year of operation for the Representative's office, the initial budget was based on recommendations of the transition committee. The RCY was able to operate within this allocation.

After eight months of operational experience and the development of a service plan, the Representative determined that the statutory mandate and goals articulated in the service plan could only be met if there was an increase to the organization's budget.

During the 2008-2009 budget process, the Representative requested this increase based on actual experience to date and costs associated with a fuller understanding of the mandate, the opening of three offices to provide services province-wide and a focus on advocacy.

A significant budget increase has been approved for the 2008-2009 budget.

Expense Type	2007/08	2007/08	Variance
	Estimates	Actual	Est. to Actual
	\$	\$	\$
Full-time equivalents (FTEs)	30.0	24.7	5.3
Salaries of permanent and temporary employees	2,377,000	2,076,229	300,771
Supplemental salaries	-	14,874	(14,874)
Employee benefits	678,000	528,515	149,485
Boards and commissions	27,000	-	27,000
Travel	224,000	247,013	(23,013)
Centralized management support services	532,000	527,182	4,818
Professional services	237,000	662,209	(425,209)
Information systems	44,000	75,127	(31,127)
Office and business expenses	218,000	262,507	(44,507)
Informational advertising/publications	50,000	71,513	(21,513)
Statutory advertising/publications	23,000	700	22,300
Utilities, materials and supplies	3,000	3,715	(715)
Operating equipment and vehicles	7,000	19,008	(12,008)
Amortization	29,000	3,519	25,481
Building occupancy *	306,000	8,915	297,085
Transfers - general	-	188,833	(188,833)
Other expenses	60,000	519	59,481
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>4,815,000</b>	<b>4,690,377</b>	<b>124,623</b>

\*Building occupancy charges are included in centralized management support services with shared service provider ARES.



## Conclusion

My staff and I have been honoured to meet with and speak to thousands of people in our first year, including children, youth, families, Aboriginal and civic leaders, community groups and front-line workers.

Most poignant to me personally have been the meetings with the parents, grandparents, siblings and friends of children who have been seriously harmed or died. It is a gripping experience to meet with family members and to really see the tragedy that isn't over for them. While it is encouraging to see that many are in a healing process, it is especially heartening to hear their support for the creation and work of my office.

The stories and messages I hear – from Elders to our youngest – remind me that these voices are our past and our future. Their experiences are the guiding force of our work, and we must listen to, respect and learn from them.

The Hughes Review observed that "safety is about protection from abuse and neglect. Well-being is about a child's social, educational and developmental progress." Safety and well-being must be equally valued. Our goal should be to reduce the "poverty of opportunity" for children and to increase the numbers making successful transitions to adulthood.

As an independent Officer of the Legislature, I report to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth, and I would like to thank the committee for its support and wisdom over the past year.

In addition, my office has established key advisory groups to guide us in our work, such as our Multidisciplinary Team and an advisory group to provide expert advice on issues regarding services to special needs children and youth.

As well, the Children's Forum has proven to be an excellent avenue for regular, open discussion on issues of concern related to children, youth and their families.

The expertise and knowledge from all of these groups has improved the work we have done, and I am most appreciative of their advice and support.

To be in this role is humbling, and the opportunity to help contribute to our children's better futures is an honour.

Respectfully,

*Mary Ellen Lafond*

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond  
Representative for Children and Youth

Above left to right: MCFD Minister Tom Christensen and Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond with attendees at the RCY Victoria Open House, November 2007; Songhees Singers and Drummers, led by Dell Dick, RCY Victoria Open House, November 2007.



REPRESENTATIVE FOR  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

## Children and Youth in care have the following rights:

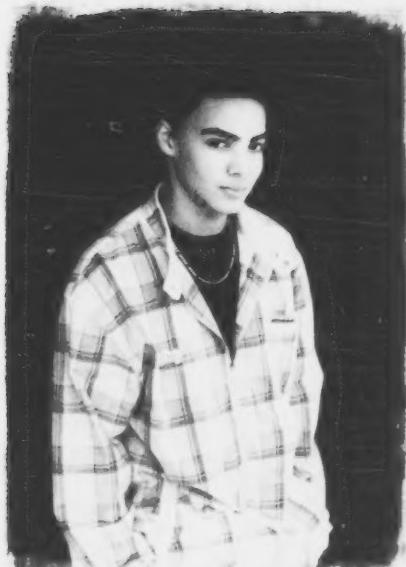
To be fed, clothed and nurtured the same as others in their communities and to be given the same quality of care as other children in their placement

To be informed about their plans of care

To be consulted and to express their views about significant decisions affecting them



To reasonable privacy and to possession of their personal belongings



To be free from physical punishment

To be informed by their caregivers how they are expected to behave and the consequences of not behaving like that



To receive the medical and dental care they need



To participate in social and recreational activities that are available according to their abilities and interests

# **Children and Youth in care have the following rights:**



To learn about the religion of their choice and to participate in it

To be informed of their legal rights and the ways those rights can be enforced

To receive guidance and encouragement to maintain their cultural heritage



To have an interpreter provided if language or disability prevents them from being consulted about decisions affecting their custody or care

To privacy during discussions with members of their families, unless that has been prohibited by a court order

To privacy during discussions with a lawyer, the Representative or Ombudsman or their staff, or an MLA or MP

To be informed about and assisted with contacting the Office of the Representative or the Ombudsman



For more information, contact the Representative and her advocates

Toll-free: 1-800-476-3933

E-mail: [rcy@rcybc.ca](mailto:rcy@rcybc.ca)

Website: [www.rcybc.ca](http://www.rcybc.ca)





REPRESENTATIVE FOR  
**CHILDREN AND YOUTH**